



File Code: 1950

Date: July 19, 2019

Dear Interested Party:

This project announcement letter serves to initiate scoping, “an early and open process for determining the scope of issues to be addressed” (40 CFR 1501.7). I request your input on the following proposed action regarding the North Fork Saline Project. The Jessieville-Winona-Fourche Ranger District proposes to implement the following management activities (acreages are approximate):

- Seedtree regeneration harvest* – 459 acres
- Shelterwood harvest* - 123 acres
- Commercial thinning – 2,349 acres
- Site preparation* – 582 acres
- Site preparation of storm damaged area** - 742 acres
- Clear cut genetically modified loblolly pines and replant native species** – 405 acres
- Timber Stand improvement-midstory removal* – 1,964 acres
- Stand improvement- release* – 1,130 acres
- Prescribed burning – 14,309 acres
- Fire line construction – 6 miles
- Fire line reconstruction/maintenance – 2 miles
- Wildlife Stand Improvement – 1,122 acres
- Glade Restoration – 48 acres
- New wildlife pond – 1 pond
- Nest box installation – 2 units
- Road reconstruction/maintenance – 36 miles
- Temporary road construction – 8 miles
- Road decommission – 4.6 miles (roads Y36A, Y36B, Y36L, and 809 (western end only))

*Includes use of herbicides, prescribed burning, and manual hand tools such as chainsaws

**Includes use of herbicides, prescribed burning, manual hand tools such as chainsaws, and mechanical site prep such as bulldozers

Maps associated with this proposed action are available on-line at:

<http://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=55319>.

The project area is located approximately 12 miles south of Perryville, Arkansas in Saline and Perry Counties in T1N R 17W, T2N R17-18W, and T3N, R17-18W. Of the 18,209 acre project area, 14,309 acres are located on National Forest system lands. The proposed action would occur in Management Areas (MA) 6, 9, 14, 17, and 20.

Purpose of the Action

Overall guidance for the proposed project is found in the 2005 Revised Land and Resource Management Plan (Revised Forest Plan) for the Ouachita National Forest. The primary goal of the Revised Forest Plan is to promote diverse, healthy, productive, and sustainable



ecosystems. The purpose of this action is to restore the health and vigor of the project area by providing for a diversity of plant and animal communities, early seral habitat in a well-distributed grass/forb or shrub/seedling stage, reduction in fuel accumulation, and production of a sustainable yield of wood products.

Need for the Action

- Current conditions in the project area do not meet the desired conditions for the forest MAs and the ecological systems that occur within.
- Past fire suppression activities have removed the natural role of fire from the landscape. This absence of fire has resulted in excessive fuel accumulations, increasing the risk of damage to resources in the event of wildfire.
- The absence of fire has resulted in reduced open understories necessary for the growth of many native plant communities; wildlife foods, and the natural regeneration of pine and oak.
- Pine stands contain damaged, poorly formed and diseased trees. The trees are overcrowded or densely stocked, which reduces growth and crown development. These conditions result in stress and reduced vigor and health, and increases susceptibility to insects and disease.
- Some stands contain genetically modified loblolly pine trees. These trees are more susceptible to disease and insects than native species.
- There is limited access to those stands in need of silvicultural treatment, resulting in the need for temporary road construction. Some existing roads are not useable by log trucks for hauling, creating the need for road re-construction.
- There is a lack of high quality forage and a lack of nesting habitat for species requiring early successional habitat within the project area.
- There is a lack of suitable natural cavities for nesting within the project area.
- There is need for standing water to be available throughout the project area year-round for consumption by wildlife and as reproductive sites for native amphibian species.
- There is need for restoration of glade areas.
- There are stands of storm damaged trees in need of silvicultural treatment.

Invitation to Participate in Project Planning

Scoping is not limited to a single point in time; we will continue to accept and consider comments until an implementation decision is made. With that said, your comments will be most helpful if they are received early in the process. They will help us identify environmental issues associated with implementation, and alternative ways to meet Forest plan objectives and desired conditions. Your involvement will enable us to better assess concerns of the public.

Comments received in response to this solicitation, including names and addresses of those who comment, will become a part of the public record for this proposed action. Comments submitted anonymously will be accepted and considered; however, anonymous comments will not provide the Agency with the ability to provide the respondent with subsequent environmental documents.

Objection Process

This project is subject to subparts A and B of 36 *CFR Part 218 Project-Level Predecisional Administrative Review Process* (objection process); it is not authorized under the Healthy Forest Restoration Act (HFRA).

The designated opportunity for public comment in response to this solicitation is **July 22, 2019** to **Aug 23, 2019**. Providing specific written comments during this time will afford you standing to later file an objection to the project, should you desire (see Upcoming Project Planning Steps).

Pursuant to §218.2, specific written comments should be within the scope of the proposed action, have a direct relationship to the proposed action, and must include supporting reasons for the responsible official to consider.

How to Comment

Specific written comments must be submitted to: Megan M. Moynihan, District Ranger, P.O. Box 189, Jessieville, AR 71949 or faxed to 501-984-6253. Oral or hand-delivered comments may be made at 8607 Hwy 7 N, Jessieville, AR during normal weekday business hours from 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Send electronic comments, in a common digital format, to comments-southern-ouachita-jessieville-winona-fourche@fs.fed.us.

Upcoming Project Planning Steps

As stated above, your comments will help us identify issues and they will be used to formulate alternatives to this proposal. An environmental analysis will be conducted and the results will be documented in an environmental assessment (EA).

Upon completion, the EA will be released for public review and comment. A 30-day notice and comment period pursuant to 36 CFR 218 will be initiated. This comment period will afford you another opportunity to obtain standing to later file an objection to the project, should you desire.

An objection period, if required, will follow the regulation found in §218.7. Issues raised in objections must be based on previously submitted specific written comments regarding the project and attributed to the objector, unless the issue is based on new information that arose after a designated opportunity to comment (§218.8(c)). If you have questions about this project or would like more information, please contact Paula Homan at 501-984-5313 ext. 107 or phoman@fs.fed.us.

Sincerely,



MEGAN M. MOYNIHAN
District Ranger